

EXHIBIT A

Democracy Dies in Darkness

Trump told donors he will crush pro-Palestinian protests, deport demonstrators

Trump has waffled on whether the Israel-Gaza war should end. But speaking to wealthy donors behind closed doors, he said that he supports Israel's right to continue "its war on terror."

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By Josh Dawsey, Karen DeYoung and Marianne LeVine

Former president Donald Trump promised to crush pro-Palestinian protests on college campuses, telling a roomful of donors — a group that he joked included “98 percent of my Jewish friends” — that he would expel student demonstrators from the United States, according to participants in the roundtable event with him in New York.

“One thing I do is, any student that protests, I throw them out of the country. You know, there are a lot of foreign students. As soon as they hear that, they’re going to behave,” Trump said on May 14, according to donors at the event.

When one of the donors complained that many of the students and professors protesting on campuses could one day hold positions of power in the United States, Trump called the demonstrators part of a “radical revolution” that he vowed to defeat. He praised the New York Police Department for clearing the campus at Columbia University and said other cities needed to follow suit, saying “it has to be stopped now.”

“Well, if you get me elected, and you should really be doing this, if you get me reelected, we’re going to set that movement back 25 or 30 years,” he said, according to the donors, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to detail a private event.

Trump has waffled publicly about whether Israel should continue its war in Gaza, saying “get it over with ... get back to peace and stop killing people.” Major Republican donors have lobbied him in recent months to take a stronger stance backing Israel and its prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu.

The private New York meeting offers new insight into his current thinking. Speaking to wealthy donors behind closed doors, Trump said that he supports Israel’s right to continue “its war on terror” and boasted of his White House policies toward Israel.

The former president didn’t mention Netanyahu, whom he resents for acknowledging Joe Biden’s victory in 2020 and hasn’t spoken to in years.

Trump has offered few policy specifics about how he would treat Israel in a second term. He cast doubt on the viability of an independent Palestinian state in a recent Time magazine interview, saying he was “not sure a two-state solution anymore is gonna work,” adding: “there may not be another idea.” A two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been the end goal of U.S. policy under Democratic and Republican presidents for decades.

Trump’s campaign did not respond to detailed questions about The Washington Post’s reporting. “When President Trump is back in the Oval Office, Israel will once again be protected, Iran will go back to being broke, terrorists will be hunted down, and the bloodshed will end,” Karoline Leavitt, the campaign’s national press secretary, wrote in an email.

Both Trump and Biden have struggled with the politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the campaign trail. Biden's base is deeply divided on the Israel-Gaza war, but Trump's rhetoric on the subject has limited his ability to capitalize on his opponent's problems.

Trump has repeatedly claimed in public statements and interviews that Hamas's Oct. 7 attack on Israel, which sparked the Gaza war, would have never happened if he were president.

But he has also criticized Israel's approach to the war, albeit in somewhat confusing terms. In a March interview with the Israeli newspaper Israel Hayom, Trump said, "You have to finish up your war. To finish it up. You gotta get it done." In April, he argued the war was bad for Israel's image, telling conservative talk show radio host Hugh Hewitt that Israel is "absolutely losing the PR war."

Trump took a different tone in the meeting with donors. Instead of saying it was time to wrap up the war, he said he supported Israel's right to continue its attack on Gaza.

"But I'm one of the only people that says that now. And a lot of people don't even know what October 7th is," Trump said.

Trump repeatedly listed for the donors everything he believed he had done for Israel in the White House. He moved the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem, bucking decades of U.S. policy. He recognized the Golan Heights, which Israel seized from Syria in 1967, as an integral part of Israel after what he said was a five-minute conversation with David Friedman, his ambassador there.

He also polled the room if they liked Friedman.

"So I did Golan Heights. You know that's worth \$2 trillion, they said, that piece, if you put it in real estate terms. But it's worth more than that. It is," Trump said, according to donors present.

Israel, Trump argued, needs his help. Street demonstrations for Israel get smaller crowds than his rallies, he said. In Washington, and particularly in Congress, "Israel is losing its power," he added. "It's incredible."

The former president repeatedly expressed frustration that Jewish Americans did not vote for him as much as he believes they should, the donors said.

"But how can a Jewish person vote for a Democrat, and Biden in particular — but forget Biden. They always let you down," he said, referring to Democrats.

Trump has made similar comments in public, occasionally triggering backlash. Some Jewish Americans have said that his rhetoric evokes the antisemitic idea that American Jews are more loyal to their religion or to Israel than to the United States.

Several influential Republican donors, including Miriam Adelson, have pressed Trump to publicly express support not only for Israel but also for Netanyahu, its embattled leader.

Trump never mentioned Netanyahu at the roundtable. But he has frequently complained about Netanyahu in public — particularly after the Israeli prime minister acknowledged Biden's victory in the 2020 election even as Trump was still fiercely challenging the results.

"Bibi Netanyahu rightfully has been criticized for what took place on October 7," Trump told Time, referring to the Israeli government's failure to prevent the surprise attack, in which Hamas militants killed about 1,200 Israelis and took 253 hostage. He also recalled that he had "a bad experience with Bibi," claiming that Israel had planned to participate in the 2020 U.S. strike that killed Iranian Gen. Qasem Soleimani but backed out at the last minute.

Trump's annoyance with Netanyahu dates to his time in the White House and his frustration that he felt he did not get enough credit for what he did for Israel and its leader when he was in office, John Bolton, Trump's former national security adviser, said in an interview.

"He doesn't like Netanyahu ... it's because Bibi is one of the premier democratic politicians in the world in terms of getting publicity about himself and Trump resents that," said Bolton, a frequent Trump critic. "Trump fundamentally sees Netanyahu as getting credit for things Trump thinks he ought to get credit for."

Until the 2020 election, the two leaders had a close working relationship, according to one person familiar with their relationship, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe the leaders' private conversations. But Trump was "taken aback" by a video Netanyahu made congratulating Biden on his victory. Trump, this person said, thought the video was a "little too cordial."

Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), a Trump ally and sometimes critic, didn't directly address Trump's comments about Israel when asked about them in an interview. But he offered a broad assessment.

"We can have our opinions about our allies but I think they're in the middle of a fight for their life, there'll be plenty of time for the accountability to be had," he said. "The best route to deliver that accountability will be the Israeli people."

Trump and Netanyahu's relationship will "continue to prosper and flourish" if they're both in office at the same time again, Matthew Brooks, chief executive of the Republican Jewish Coalition, said in an interview.

"He's giving the Israelis a blank check to go in and do what they need to do to destroy Hamas and eliminate the threat in Gaza from Hamas. And what he's also saying, which is actually true, he said 'but do it quickly' because time is not Israel's ally right now," Brooks said.

"President Biden stands against antisemitism and is committed to the safety of the Jewish community, and security of Israel. Donald Trump does not," James Singer, a spokesman for the Biden campaign, said in a statement earlier this month.

Top Trump allies recently visited Israel for meetings with Netanyahu and other officials in a delegation headed by Robert O'Brien, another of Trump's former White House national security advisers. The trip was organized by the pro-Israel American Israel Public Affairs Committee, and the group did not come bearing messages from Trump or speaking on behalf of the Trump administration, said Ed McMullen, who served as U.S. ambassador to Switzerland under the Trump administration.

The group watched gruesome footage of the Oct. 7 attack and toured parts of the country where Israelis had been killed or kidnapped, making for an "educational visit that was life-changing," McMullen said. The group is likely to debrief Trump on the trip at some point, he added.

At the donor roundtable, Trump said he had studied Jewish history and had thoughts about this moment in U.S. history.

"And you know, you go back through history, this is like just before the Holocaust. I swear. If you look, it's the same thing," Trump said. "You had a weak president or head of the country. And it just built and built. And then, all of a sudden, you ended up with Hitler. You ended up with a problem like nobody knew."

What readers are saying

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